DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 344 135 CG 024 128

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TITLE Evaluating a Student Assistance Program (SAP) as Part of a Larger Prevention Effort: Growing Up Well.
PUB DATE 21 Apr 92
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Francisco, CA, April 20-24, 1992).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Education; Elementary School Students; *Evaluation Methods; *Prevention; *Program Evaluation; Substance Abuse

ABSTRACT

This project, funded by the Office for Substance Abuse Prevention (OSAP), is a comprehensive, multilevel prevention model for elementary school students, grades K-6. The project is based on OSAP's risk and resiliency factor model in which factors presumed to predispose youth toward or away from alcohol and other drug (AOD) use are influenced, thereby decreasing the likelihood that youths will become AOD users. The unique feature of the project is the integration of a student assistance program (SAP) with the larger prevention effort. Two sets of variables were addressed in the evaluation: process variables, which addressed the specific program components, and outcome variables, which addressed the specific risk and resiliency factors. The main issue for evaluation was determining the effects of the SAP alone and integrated with other project components. The SAP only was implemented in one school, the SAP and curriculum in a second school, and neither in a third school. A number of issues related to evaluating the SAP within the larger evaluation effort were addressed. These issues show that: (1) stakeholders from a larger number of agencies with more diverse interests must be involved in planning the evaluation; (2) the variables and instruments used to evaluated the SAP must articulate with the other program components; (3) data collection and storage must be coordinated at multiple sites; and (4) reporting must accommodate the needs of a much broader audience. (LLL)

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Evaluating a Student Assistance Program (SAP) as Part of a Larger Prevention Effort: *Growing Up Well*

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AERA Annual Meeting, San Francisco, CA

April 1992

CG024128

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The *Growing Up Well* Project

Project Overview

Growing Up Well is a five-year, cooperative project of the Southwest Regional Laboratory (SWRL), the South Bay Juvenile Diversion Project, and the Redondo Beach City Elementary School District. The project, funded by the Office for Substance Abuse Prevention (OSAP), is a comprehensive, multilevel prevention model for elementary school students, grades K-6. The project is based on OSAP's risk and resiliency factor model in which factors presumed to predispose youth toward or away from alcohol and other drug (AOD) use are influenced, thereby decreasing the likelihood that youth will become AOD users. The unique feature of the project is the integration of a student assistance program (SAP) with the larger prevention effort. However, this creates a number of issues related to evaluation.

Project Goals

Growing Up Well is designed to accomplish five goals addressing the risk and resiliency factors related to high-risk youth, as described by OSAP:

1. Decrease the incidence and prevalence of alcohol and other drug use among high-risk youth.

2. Decrease the risk factors within high-risk youth and within high-risk families and communities to reduce the likelihood that youths will use alcohol and other drugs.

3. Increase the resiliency and protective factors within high-risk youth and within high-risk families and communities to reduce the likelihood that youths will use alcohol and other drugs.

4. Coordinate and integrate the nonuse messages and activities of the many human service systems and other social influences affecting high-risk youth into comprehensive, multilevel prevention communities.

5. Increase the availability and accessibility of prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation services for high-risk youth.

Project Components

Growing Up Well features the integration of five components of a comprehensive AOD prevention program:

- Growing Healthy. A comprehensive, holistic curriculum will be provided for students at Washington Elementary School in Redondo Beach, CA. This curriculum is designed to develop healthy lifestyles among children by providing situations in which they may assume responsibility, share knowledge, discuss values, make decisions, and create activities to illustrate their comprehension and internalization of concepts, attitudes, feelings, and behaviors related to health issues.

- South Bay Juvenile Diversion Services. Community-based counseling services for youth and their families will be provided for students referred through the SAP at Washington and Birney Elementary Schools. This non-profit program has served the community since 1975. Services to be provided include school-based groups, as well as individualized counseling for students and families.

- Parent Education. A low-cost, videotape modeling and discussion program for parents with problem children will be offered to parents of students referred through the SAP.

- School/Community/Law Enforcement Partnership. A joint effort by a variety of agencies, businesses, and organizations (including the Beach Cities Coalition for Alcohol and Drug-Free Youth, an OSAP community partnership grantee) will be used to coordinate and expand services and provide consistent no-use messages to all community members. This includes implementation of *Neighborhoods in Action*, a three-part parent education program offered through local Neighborhood Watch programs and cable television.

- Student Assistance Program (SAP). Will be provided for students in grades K-6 at Washington and Birney Elementary Schools. Four elements will be implemented over the course of the project: (a) training of school staff to recognize behavior patterns that may indicate a student is at risk; (b) counseling and referral system; (c) in-school support groups; and (d) educational assistance.

Population Served

The target population is a group of at-risk students in three elementary schools sandwiched in urban Los Angeles County.

The project sites are Chapter 1-wide schools. That is, at least 75% of their students qualify for federal assistance because of the poverty level of the students' families. One of the schools has the added distinction of qualifying for the U.S. Department of Education's list of Chapter 1 schools most in need of improvement.

These schools are located within the Redondo Beach City Elementary School District. Data from the 1990-91 California Basic Educational Data System indicate that 35% to 40% of the pupils come from minority backgrounds. Educators in the three schools maintain that a significant number of their children come from single-parent households. Most of these children come from families where the single adult in the home is a divorced mother.

Process and Outcome Evaluations

Two sets of variables will be addressed in the evaluation of *Growing Up Well*—process measures and outcome measures. Process variables are defined to address the specific program components. Outcome variables are defined to address the specific risk and resiliency factors.

Process Evaluation

To develop a replicable demonstration program, substantial effort must be devoted to determining the actual operating practices of the programs. One needs to know the fidelity with which the program model was implemented, what problems were encountered in the development process, what changes should be made in program design prior to program dissemination, and whether there were any unanticipated side effects, positive or negative.

In addition, during the early phases of program implementation, process evaluation should be used as a management tool to guide program development. During the first program year, providing a comprehensive analysis of program operations and describing how the program is interacting with its environment are extremely valuable operations.

For each program component, evidence will be gathered regarding program implementation. There is no service delivery in the first year of the *Growing Up Well* project. We were fortunate to receive an entire year funded for planning by OSAP. Therefore, the process measures do not

focus on the typical aspects of numbers served, integrity of service delivery, etc. Instead, process measures in the first year of the *Growing Up Well* project can be divided into four main groups:

1. The design and management of the various program components. Issues to be evaluated are related to efficiency, interagency cooperation, and problem/conflict resolution.

2. Staff training needs. This includes training Redondo Beach School District personnel regarding the SAP component, as well as the counselors involved in the South Bay Juvenile Diversion Project.

3. The baseline assessments to be conducted. This includes the baseline assessment of seventh-grade AOD attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors; the survey of alcohol sales establishments, and community indicators.

4. The handling of privacy requirements and confidentiality issues.

Descriptions of the process, problems encountered and resolved, timeliness of start-up activities, and information dissemination will result in a body of information that can support implementation of comprehensive programs in the future at other sites. This information will help to clarify issues inherent in this type of effort, guide realistic expectations, and potentially prevent problems.

During years two through five, process issues related to the delivery of services and the five project components will be assessed. The goal of this phase of the process evaluation is to describe the actual operations of the services delivered. This includes the numbers and types of individuals and families served, the amount of services provided, fidelity of service delivery, and client satisfaction with services. This information will help to support future project replication at other sites. This also will help in explaining the overall effects of the project and the impact of specific components.

The use of both qualitative and quantitative measures in the process evaluation will provide multiple independent sources of information regarding the project. Quantitative information will be combined with comprehensive, contextual descriptions of program outcomes to provide a complete picture of project component operations.

Outcome Evaluation

A program as large and innovative as *Growing Up Well* requires an outcome evaluation of sufficient rigor to accurately and unambiguously assess program effects. We have attempted to lay the foundation for a solid outcome evaluation that will be both comprehensive and unambiguous in its depiction of program outcomes.

The comparison school, Tulita Elementary, has a similar student body to the two elementary schools participating in the program. SWRL has a commitment from the school district to support all needed evaluation activities at all five school sites where some outcome evaluation activities will be conducted: the two elementary schools, the comparison school, and the two middle schools into which these elementary schools feed.

Evaluation activities measuring program outcomes will not begin until the second year of the program. However, baseline data will be collected during the first year. This will be done with the survey of seventh-grade students; the survey of alcohol sales establishments, and community indicators of AOD use.

The outcome variables we will assess are proxy measures for a variety of risk and resiliency factors. School attendance and school performance will be measured directly. The child's discipline problems, antisocial behavior, social adjustment, and community integration will be measured with the parent and teacher forms of the Child Behavior Checklist. Parenting skills, family management, and family bonding factors will be assessed with the Parenting Stress Index and the parent form of the Child Behavior Checklist. Knowledge of AOD effects, normative expectations regarding AOD use, and age of first use will be assessed with the Biennial Statewide Survey of AOD Use Among California Students. Alcohol availability will be assessed with the survey of alcohol sales establishments. Finally, health awareness and the effects of the health curriculum will be assessed by examining the referrals to the SAP.

Issues and Recommendations

Issues Related To Evaluating the SAP and the Larger Effort

The main issue we had to deal with was determining the effects of the SAP alone and integrated with the other project components. The way we designed the implementation supports these efforts. We have implemented only the SAP in one school, the SAP and curriculum in a second school, and neither in a third school. The key assumption we are making is that these schools

share a common community that is small enough that the effects of nonproject prevention activities do not vary from school to school.

By implementing different components at the different sites, we can make comparisons among the students attending these three elementary schools regarding the impact of the key school-based components. We have a group of students who have received only SAP services, a group that has received SAP services and health curriculum, and a group that received neither. Therefore, we can assess the differential effects among these three student populations to determine the impact of the components.

A number of issues related to evaluating the SAP within the larger evaluation effort complicates this endeavor and must be addressed.

First, stakeholders from a larger number of agencies with more diverse interests must be involved in planning the evaluation. A good example of this is related to the parent education component. There is already a parent education project in the district that is funded with California drug, alcohol, and tobacco education funds; there is an evening parent education program on a local cable channel produced by the Los Angeles Unified School District that the school counselors recommend to parents; and then there is the guided videotape program and groups we are instituting. The goals and effects of all of these had to be taken into account in developing the evaluation related to the parent education component as parents of youth sent to the SAP may be referred to any of these.

Second, the variables and instruments used to evaluate the SAP must articulate with the other program components. For example, the instruments chosen to assess change in students receiving services had to be acceptable to the psychologists and counselors at the school, the South Bay Juvenile Diversion Project, and the agencies the diversion project uses to refer cases to.

Third, we had to coordinate data collection and storage at multiple sites. We ended up designing a single information transmittal form that covered all the information we needed to track the students in the project. This form is laid out to include information easily tracked and identified by all the agencies involved.

Finally, our reporting had to accommodate the needs of a much broader audience. Although all groups had input regarding the interpretation of findings, we made clear the line we would not cross regarding censorship. We also identified appropriate key dissemination groups or individuals for the various reports. For example, the school board is disseminating the results of the survey of substance use among the seventh-grade students. The Beach Cities Coalition for

Alcohol and Drug-Free Youth disseminated the report of the survey of alcohol sales establishments.

Overall, I would make the following recommendations in evaluating large, multiple component, multiple site projects such as *Growing Up Well:*

- Get all parties involved as early as possible to avoid surprises.
- Openly establish the goals and motives of all involved. Acknowledge self-serving motives as acceptable.
- Make sure strategies chosen are appropriate to the target population. For example, a first-grade student cannot complete the same forms as a fifth-grade student. Also, assess the need for multilingual forms.
- Institutionalize efforts. Forms must be acceptable to all parties, and should reduce paperwork instead of duplicate it as much as possible, if they are to be used. Procedures must be clearly described for all aspects of service provision and data collection. We developed a procedure manual that includes a flow chart.
- Provide feedback to all involved parties. This needs to be done regularly during staff meetings. Keeping people informed is the easiest way to keep them involved.